

THE TALE OF THE MULEY COW

ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY

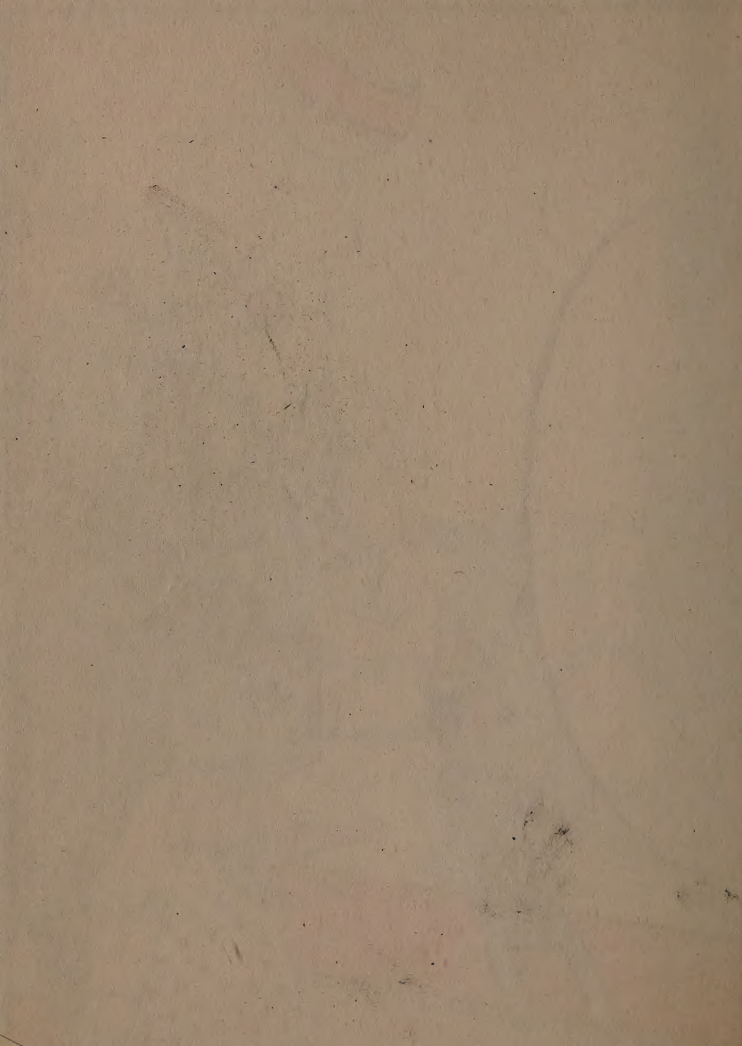


SLUMBER-TOWN TALES



Donathy Heard
Oct. 1, 1932







"I Hope You Won't Mind," Said the Muley Cow.
Frontispiece—(Page 22)

SLUMBER-TOWN TALES

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THE TALE OF THE MULEY COW

BY

ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



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THE TALE OF THE MULEY COW

I

JOHNNIE GREEN'S FAVORITE

A FEW of the farmyard folk were a bit jealous of the Muley Cow. The little red lady that stood on one side of her, in the barn, often said that Johnnie Green was wasting too many goodies on her. It seemed as if he never entered the cow barn without bringing some tidbit for old Muley, as her neighbors called her—behind her back. If it wasn't a potato that Johnnie fished out of his pocket it might be an apple or a carrot, or maybe a

piece of pumpkin, or turnip, or beet.

At such times the little red cow would cast a knowing look at the big white person on the other side of the Muley Cow, as if to say, "There! He's at it again! Did you ever, in all your life?" And the big white cow would twist her head as far around as her stanchion would let her, and stretch her lean neck to the utmost, hoping for a share of the treat. She often told the little red cow, privately, that the delicious smell of such things as potatoes and apples was enough to drive anybody frantic.

They had agreed, long before, that it was very unpleasant to be stabled beside Johnnie Green's favorite. That was what they called the Muley Cow—"the Favorite" (when they didn't speak of her as "old Muley"). But when they spoke *to* her they were as polite as you please,

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because she was the oldest cow on the farm and was an aunt to both of them.

Whenever Johnnie Green gave some dainty morsel to the Muley Cow he first cut it into medium sized pieces with his jackknife. There was a good reason why he did that, as you will learn later.

Merely feeding good things to her was not the only way in which Johnnie showed that the Muley Cow was his favorite. Next to the choice mouthfuls that he brought her, she liked to have him curry and brush her, just as he curried and brushed the ancient horse, Ebenezer. Especially in the winter, when she stood long hours in the barn with her neck in a stanchion, did the Muley Cow enjoy Johnnie's attentions with currycomb and brush.

In the summer, when she spent every day in the pasture, she was able to lick her

back with her long, rough tongue whenever she pleased; and sometimes she would even get some friend to do it for her. But you may be sure she never sought such a favor of the little red cow, nor the big white one, either. Naturally they could scarcely have refused, had their aunt asked them. But the Muley Cow knew well enough that they would make disagreeable remarks afterward. So when she wanted help she usually turned to some cow whose place in the barn was a long way from her own. Somehow her best friends were those that didn't spend the winter near enough to her to notice whenever Johnnie Green gave her something good to eat.

Really it was not strange that Johnnie Green petted the Muley Cow. Farmer Green had given her to Johnnie. She belonged to him. But the Muley Cow never

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spoke of the matter in just that way. She preferred to say that Johnnie Green belonged to her.

II

WHY JOHNNIE HURRIED

It was a proud day for Johnnie Green when his father told him that he might have the Muley Cow for his very own. The moment he heard the news Johnnie couldn't help interrupting his father with a shout.

"Not so fast!" said Farmer Green, with what Johnnie knew was only a "pretend" frown. "She's not yours—yet. And when you learn what you'll have to do to win her perhaps you won't want the old cow after all."

"Won't. I?" cried Johnnie Green. "I'll do anything you ask of me!"

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“When you’ve learned to milk her, she’ll be yours,” his father said.

It was noon on a summer day when all this happened. And Johnnie Green wanted to go to the pasture at once and drive the Muley Cow home to be milked. But his father wouldn’t let him do that. He said Johnnie must wait until milking-time came, that evening.

Now, it had often happened, in the past, that Johnnie was late in driving the cows home. But on this day he started off for the pasture with old dog Spot a half hour earlier than usual. Any cows that lingered to snatch a mouthful of tempting grass by the wayside found themselves rudely urged along toward the barn.

There was some grumbling among them. And the Muley Cow told her companions that if she had known Johnnie Green was going to be in such a hurry she would have

jumped the fence into the back pasture and stayed there as long as she pleased.

They had not been in the barn a great while before the Muley Cow had a surprise. Johnnie Green, carrying a three-legged stool in one hand and a milk pail in the other, stepped alongside her, on her left.

"If I were you, I'd get on the other side," said his father with a grin, "unless you want her to kick you and teach you better."

Johnnie Green couldn't help looking sheepish. If his father hadn't cautioned him he would have tried to milk the Muley Cow on the wrong side. He was so eager to learn to milk her, and to win her for a prize, that he scarcely knew what he was doing.

There was a stir among the cows near-

by. They talked in a rumbling undertone, telling one another that Farmer Green's boy was going to learn to milk the Muley Cow and saying they were glad it was not themselves that Johnnie was going to try to milk.

"No boy shall ever milk me!" the little red cow muttered to the Muley Cow. "If I were you I'd give him a good kick."

"Oh! I can't do that," the Muley Cow told her. "Farmer Green has always treated me well. I don't want to hurt his boy."

"I'd give him a good fright, at least," the big white cow advised her. "I'd put my foot in the pail, if he tried to milk me."

But the Muley Cow said that she would stand as still as she could and give down her milk just as she always did for Farmer Green himself.

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And everybody told her that she was making a big mistake.

III

WORKING FOR A PRIZE

OF course Johnnie Green was very slow the first time he milked the Muley Cow. For a few minutes his father stood beside him and told him a few things that he needed to know. And then Farmer Green went away and left Johnnie to do his best all alone.

“Now’s your chance!” the little red cow said to the Muley Cow. “Upset the boy before Farmer Green comes back!”

But the Muley Cow didn’t even stop chewing her cud long enough to answer. She looked so mild and contented that no one would have guessed she was wishing

more than ever that she had jumped the fence and lost herself in the back pasture. It seemed to her that Johnnie Green never would finish milking her.

"I hope he'll be done with me by dark," she said to herself. "I wouldn't like to lose any of my night's rest."

Yet she never let anybody know that she was impatient. She stood as still as she could, only lifting a foot and stamping now and then when some fly was too bothersome. And she never switched her tail except when a fly gave her an unusually hard bite. To be sure, once she brought the end of her tail *smack* across Johnnie Green's cheek. But that was a mistake. Though it stung sharply, all Johnnie Green said was, "So, boss! So, boss!"

She was glad when Farmer Green came back at last, peeped into the pail that Johnnie was clutching between his knees,

and said, "Well, you haven't done badly. But you'd better let me finish for you."

So Johnnie slipped off the three-legged stool and watched while his father sat down and got the rest of the Muley Cow's milk in no time.

"Farmer Green milked eight cows while that lazy boy was puttering with you," the little red cow said to the Muley Cow.

"Well, well! I suppose Farmer Green had to learn to milk when he was a boy," the Muley Cow replied, as she flicked a big fly off her back. "And this boy of his," she added, "he's going to be a good milker—once he gets the knack of it."

Just then Johnnie Green came trotting down the long passageway in front of the cows. He stopped in front of the Muley Cow and offered her a piece of an early apple—one of the first ripe ones of the summer.

She accepted the gift with much pleasure, while her neighbors on either side stirred restlessly as she munched the apple. They said nothing just then. But anybody could see that they wished Johnnie Green would let them have a taste too.

"She earned it," the big white cow told the little red cow, later. "She had to stand still at least three-quarters of an hour, while that boy was trying to milk her."

The little red cow gave a slight sniff. "No doubt the apple was sour, anyhow," she muttered.

The Muley Cow couldn't help hearing what her two neighbors were saying. And although she was a well-mannered person and had a kindly disposition, she couldn't resist telling them that the apple was sweet and juicy.

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“If you had had a taste of it you would agree with me,” said the Muley Cow.

IV

OWNING A BOY

By the end of a week Johnnie Green was able to milk quite well. When he sat down beside the Muley Cow he could play a merry tune as he made the tiny streams of milk tinkle against the bottom of the milk pail. And he managed to milk the Muley Cow while his father was milking only three others.

“Don’t you think,” Johnnie asked his father, “that I ought to own the Muley Cow by this time?”

But Farmer Green thought that he mustn’t make the prize too easy to win. He laughed and shook his head. “When

you can milk half as fast as I can, I'll agree that she's yours," he promised.

Before a month had slipped by Johnnie Green raced with his father one night and finished milking the Muley Cow *before* his father could milk the little red cow and the big white one.

"Hurrah!" Johnnie shouted, as he jumped up from his three-legged stool. "I've got a cow of my own!" But he didn't shout too loud, for he had learned that one ought not to be noisy around the cattle.

Somehow his father seemed almost as pleased as he was.

As for the Muley Cow herself, she didn't know just how to feel. She couldn't help hearing what was said. And her neighbors were craning their necks, for they couldn't help staring at her to see how she took the news.

It was just a bit uncomfortable for the Muley Cow, at first. But when Johnnie Green patted her and picked a prickly bur off her back she felt that matters might have been worse. And when he gave her a tender young beet as a special treat she began to think that matters couldn't have been better. She saw right away that being owned by a boy wasn't a bad thing, after all. It was the *sound* of it that she didn't like.

Naturally there was a good deal of gossip among the cows. And the next day, in the pasture, one meddlesome creature went up to the Muley Cow and asked her *what she was going to do about it*.

"About what?" the Muley Cow inquired.

"About your being owned by Farmer Green's boy," the other explained. "Are you going to run away?"

Well, the Muley Cow laughed right in her face. It wasn't a thing she was used to doing. But the question seemed to her a very silly one.

"Run away!" she exclaimed. "Why should I run away? I've lived on the farm all my life and I wouldn't leave it for anything."

"But that boy! Surely, at your age, you can't enjoy belonging to anybody as young as he is!" the prying neighbor went on.

"Bless you!" cried the Muley Cow. "If he milks me, and takes me to the pasture and back, and gives me good things to eat, and brushes my coat for me, shouldn't you say that he belonged to me? It isn't every cow that has a boy like Johnnie Green to wait on her."

The meddlesome neighbor didn't quite know what answer to make. She was

rather a stupid person, anyhow. Moreover, she was a great gossip. So she hurried off to tell all her friends that they were mistaken about Johnnie Green and the Muley Cow.

A good many of her friends admitted that there was something to be said on both sides of the question. And all of them agreed that the Muley Cow was certainly Johnnie Green's favorite.

V

THE FRIENDLY SCARECROW

OLD Mr. Crow and all his cronies made fun of the scarecrow in the cornfield. They said that he was a great joke. "He doesn't know anything," they used to chuckle. "His head has nothing but straw inside it."

The Muley Cow had often heard the noisy crows laughing about the limp gentleman who hung on a long, upright stick beyond the pasture fence. She had paid little heed to him, herself, until one day she took a notion to jump the fence and taste the young shoots of corn. For they certainly did look tempting.

Being, generally, a well-mannered creature, the Muley Cow thought it only polite to speak to the scarecrow. So she lowed gently to attract his attention. And when he swung around, as he presently did, and faced her she bowed pleasantly and said, "I hope you won't mind if I sample the corn."

No one could have been more courteous than the scarecrow. To be sure, he *said* nothing. But he waved an arm (as the breeze caught it) in a wide sweep.

"Surely," the Muley Cow thought, "he means that I'm to take all I want."

After thanking him she helped herself freely to the young corn. Indeed, she was almost greedy about it. Only the fact that the scarecrow seemed to throw a look at her now and then kept her from eating more. Somehow she couldn't forget that he acted very gentlemanly, though his

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clothes were tattered and torn. And she felt that she must do nothing to offend him.

“The corn is as good as any I’ve ever tasted,” she assured him.

The scarecrow showed that he must have heard her, for he gave a sort of nod. And he tried his best to touch his hat. But the wind wasn’t blowing quite hard enough to let him do that. “Poor fellow!” the Muley Cow thought. “He hasn’t the entire use of his arms.”

Then the scarecrow went through some odd motions. First he kicked backward with one leg; then he kicked forward with the other; and after that he whirled three times around the stake that supported him.

“Now, what can he mean by that?” the Muley Cow wondered. And then all at once she gave a silly sort of giggle. “I

know!" she exclaimed. "He wants me to dance with him!"

For a moment the Muley Cow forgot that she was the oldest cow on the farm. She tossed her head, flirted her heels in the air, and cut a few clumsy capers around the scarecrow, who did his best to dance a jig—only the wind died down completely just as he was in the middle of it. And he hung from his pole in such a woebegone fashion that the Muley Cow began to feel uneasy about him.

"You're not ill, I hope?" she ventured, as she stopped her prancing.

He paid not the slightest heed to her. So with her nose the Muley Cow touched him where a knee would have been, had he had any. And even then he hung motionless.

The Muley Cow was alarmed. But she didn't linger to find out what was the mat-

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ter with the scarecrow. She heard shouting. And she heard old dog Spot barking. And knowing at once that Farmer Green had caught her in the cornfield she turned and fled as fast as she could go.

“Something’s wrong with that scarecrow,” she muttered to herself as she lumbered along toward the barnyard. “He’s so kind and gentlemanly he would surely have warned me if he had been able to. He would have let me know that Farmer Green was coming.”

VI

BUFFALO HUNTS

JOHNNIE GREEN found, after a while, that owning a cow wasn't all fun. There were times when he would have been willing to let his father, or the hired man, milk the Muley Cow. For instance, a boy from a neighboring farm might come along about milking-time with a fine plan for play. Or some one driving past the house on his way to the village might ask Johnnie to go along too.

Once or twice, on such occasions, Johnnie tried to wriggle out of milking. But he soon learned better. His father told him that a duty was a duty.

And Johnnie knew exactly what he meant.

As for the Muley Cow, she went about her business as if no great change had come into her life. And if now and then she took a notion to look for better grass in the back pasture on the edge of the woods, she would jump the fence just as she always had and stray off among the clumps of trees and bushes.

When Johnnie went to drive the cows home at "cow-come-home time," as he used to call it when he was younger, he always looked first for the Muley Cow. And if he didn't see her he always knew what had happened.

"She's in the back pasture again!" Johnnie would exclaim—sometimes none too pleasantly. For the back pasture stretched way around a shoulder of the hill, and being half overgrown it offered a

fine hiding place for the old cow. Sometimes it meant a good hour's search before Johnnie found her.

In days past Johnnie Green had been known to drive the herd home without noticing that the Muley Cow was missing. But now that she belonged to him such an oversight never happened. The Muley Cow soon noticed that Johnnie always came for her, no matter where she went.

"It won't hurt him to hunt for me now and then," she told herself. "A little work is good for a boy."

Somehow Johnnie Green did not feel just that way about work. He seemed to have an idea that work was a good thing for a boy to avoid. And if you couldn't escape it, then the wisest thing to do was to make play of it. By pretending hard enough, Johnnie had discovered that he

could make a game of almost anything his father wanted him to do.

So it wasn't long before he was enjoying buffalo hunts in the back pasture. With old dog Spot along it was a lively game and most exciting.

The Muley Cow found it exciting too. The first time that Johnnie tried to lasso her with a length of his mother's clothesline she started for home on a lumbering gallop.

And Johnnie chased her until he remembered that it was bad for a cow to run. Besides, he was out of breath. So he whistled to old Spot, who had been barking just behind the Muley Cow's heels, and told him to come back and behave himself.

That night the Muley Cow wouldn't give down her milk for the longest time.

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And Johnnie Green knew right well that she was holding it back because he had teased her.

VII

A LITTLE SURPRISE

LITTLE by little the Muley Cow learned not to be disturbed by Johnnie Green's clothesline lasso, when he swung it in wide circles about his head and then flung it at hers. She found that the rope did her no harm. Indeed, the more Johnnie practiced the more expert he became. Before a great while he could drop his noose over the Muley Cow's head almost every time he tried—when she stood still.

By that time Johnnie began to tire of the sport of buffalo hunting (with the Muley Cow for the buffalo). He wished he might try lassoing her from the back of

the old horse Ebenezer. But he hardly thought his father would approve of the plan.

Well, Johnnie, the Muley Cow and Spot the dog were in the back pasture one day, where the Muley Cow had strayed. And as Johnnie paused to pick a few blackberries he thought what a humdrum place Pleasant Valley was, anyway, and how he would like to go off where there were real buffaloes, and Indians, and—

And just then old dog Spot began to growl. His hair bristled on his back. And Johnnie Green was sure that they had stumbled on game of some sort. He hoped it was at least a woodchuck.

“Sic him, Spot!” Johnnie cried.

But old Spot hung back, instead of dashing into the bushes toward which he was pointing. That wasn’t at all like him. Johnnie Green couldn’t understand it.

The Muley Cow, too, thought it very odd. "I declare," she said to herself, "I believe old Spot's afraid of something. I believe he's afraid of a woodchuck." And she gave a sort of chuckle, thinking it a great joke. Neither she nor her friends were any too fond of Spot. And she intended to tell the whole herd how he didn't dare chase a woodchuck.

Meanwhile Johnnie Green picked up a stone and threw it into the clump of bushes. And then he heard something that was between a growl and a grunt.

The Muley Cow heard it too. She knew that no woodchuck ever made a sound like that. And all at once she caught a whiff of the strangest, *wildest* sort of scent.

It was enough for the Muley Cow. "My goodness!" she bellowed. "I'm going home!" And off she dashed down the

hillside. She had forgotten all about the joke on old dog Spot.

Johnnie Green had not noticed that the Muley Cow had fled. He was running towards the hidden game, in the thicket, when that queer grunty growl made him stop short. The next moment, not ten feet in front of him a shaggy form rose up out of the tangle and glared straight at him.

It was a bear!

VIII

IT WAS A BEAR

WHEN the bear rose out of the bushes and looked at him—and said “Woof!” too—Johnnie Green did not bellow as the Muley Cow had. But he turned and ran. Once he tripped on a root and fell headlong. But he was on his feet again in a jiffy and running faster than ever. And though he had only half as many legs as the Muley Cow, he reached the pasture fence not far behind her.

It was the first time Johnnie Green had known the Muley Cow to jump the fence *back into* the pasture, after jumping out of it. Before, she had always made him

let down the bars for her, quite as if she had never done such a giddy thing as to leap over a fence. Now, however, she was in too great a hurry to bother with bars. So she topped the fence like a deer, while Johnnie slipped through it like a pig a few seconds later, and old Spot wriggled under it like a weasel soon afterward.

Once in the pasture they all three went slipping and sliding down the steep hillside, tore through the prickly raspberry patch, splashed through the brook, and never stopped until they saw Johnnie Green's father raking hay in a field nearby. As they came to a halt at last they looked at one another somewhat foolishly.

"You were scared," Johnnie Green accused Spot. "You made a loud enough racket; but you took good care to keep out of the bear's reach."

The old dog barked his denial. He had

been the last to run away. And he thought that proved he was the bravest of the three.

“You were the scarest,” Johnnie told the Muley Cow.

And she didn’t deny it. How could she know that the most frightened of all was young Cuffy Bear, and that even then he was scrambling up the steep side of Blue Mountain? He was still putting as much ground as he could between himself and the three odd folk he had met by accident in the back pasture.

Old Spot, too, never guessed how he had scared the bear. And Johnnie wouldn’t have known it, either, except for what Farmer Green said when he heard about the adventure.

“That bear is probably running yet,” he said as he threw back his head and laughed. “He’ll never stop this side of

the mountain. He must have come down to pick blackberries. But he lost his taste for them when he saw you."

"Ho!" Johnnie Green exclaimed all at once. "I might have lassoed that bear—if I had thought in time."

IX

WEARING A POKE

THE cows never paid much attention to the woodchucks, unless it was to scold them now and then for eating too much clover. But living as they did in the pasture, the woodchucks took a great interest in Farmer Green's herd. Many a bit of gossip about some cow passed from one woodchuck hole to another, without the cow herself ever dreaming that folk were talking about her.

Whenever Billy Woodchuck's mother heard any specially interesting news about a cow she was more than likely to put on her best apron and hurry over to make a

call on Aunt Polly Woodchuck, the famous herb doctor, who lived under the hill.

Well, one morning while the dew was still on the grass Billy saw his mother dash into the house, whisk off her old apron and reach for her best one. He knew at once, without asking, exactly where she was going. Nor was he sorry, because Mrs. Woodchuck always stayed a long time at Aunt Polly's. And that gave Billy a chance to do a number of things without being told "Don't!"

Alas! "You'd better come with me," his mother said.

"Oh, I'd rather not," he protested. "I—I'm not feeling very well this morning."

"Then you must certainly come," she insisted, "for I'm going to see Aunt Polly Woodchuck and she'll give you a dose of herbs to cure you."

Billy Woodchuck began to squirm. He

saw that he had got himself into trouble.

"I'll be all right if I keep still a while," he stammered. "And then I'm going out to gather a nice lot of greens for you."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" said his mother. "You'll come with me. You'd be sure to get into mischief if I left you here."

So off they went. And Mrs. Woodchuck hurried so fast that she was quite out of breath when she reached Aunt Polly Woodchuck's house. She had to sit down and rest before she could tell Aunt Polly the news that was on the tip of her tongue.

While waiting for her guest to compose herself, Aunt Polly Woodchuck looked over her spectacles at Billy, who lingered near the door.

"Come here, young man!" she said.

Though her tone was severe, Billy Woodchuck took heart. He thought he saw a twinkle in the old lady's eye. "I can see," Aunt Polly told him, "that you need an apple." And thereupon she handed him one. And Billy Woodchuck declared as soon as he began to eat it that he felt much better.

"I hope you're quite well," Aunt Polly said to Billy's mother, who was at last beginning to get her breath.

"Yes—very!" said Mrs. Woodchuck. "I've come over to tell you the news about the Muley Cow. I hope you haven't heard it already," she added, for she dearly loved to be the first to spread a bit of gossip.

"I fear I do know it," Aunt Polly replied, as she pushed her poke bonnet back and began to fan herself with a plantain leaf. "I suppose you've just heard about

the Muley Cow's meeting Cuffy Bear in the back pasture."

Mrs. Woodchuck had begun to look disappointed. But now her honest face brightened. "Oh, no! There's newer news than that," she explained. "It hasn't anything to do with the Muley Cow's jumping the fence into the back pasture."

"Do tell!" Aunt Polly exclaimed.

"It's something about her clothes—something new she's wearing." Mrs. Woodchuck wasn't going to give up her news too soon. She liked to get people well interested before she actually told them anything.

"She hasn't a pair of horns, has she?" Aunt Polly inquired eagerly.

"Oh, no! Not that! But I knew you'd like to hear the news. I knew it would please you."

“Well, *what* is it?” Aunt Polly demanded.

“That’s a pretty poke that you have on,” Mrs. Woodchuck remarked.

Aunt Polly straightened her poke bonnet. “Thank you!” she said. “But do let me hear the news.”

“Can’t you guess it?” Mrs. Woodchuck asked her. “Can’t you guess it, now that I’ve given you a hint?”

But Aunt Polly couldn’t. So at last Mrs. Woodchuck told her the news:

“The Muley Cow is wearing a poke! I knew you’d approve of it, because you always wear one yourself.”

Aunt Polly Woodchuck threw up her hands in astonishment.

“I didn’t suppose the Muley Cow had sense enough to do that!” she exclaimed.

X

A SLIGHT MISTAKE

MRS. WOODCHUCK was glad that she had gone to Aunt Polly Woodchuck's house to tell her the news about the Muley Cow. Aunt Polly was all in a flutter, she was so eager to see the Muley Cow in her new poke bonnet.

"Is the poke becoming to her?" Aunt Polly asked Mrs. Woodchuck.

"I haven't set eyes on it," Mrs. Woodchuck said. "Old Mr. Crow told me the news only this morning. I asked him to describe the poke. But all he could say was that I'd be surprised when I saw it."

"That's the way with men folks," Aunt

Polly Woodchuck declared. "They never know anything about the styles—except that queer Mr. Frog, the tailor."

Both ladies giggled at the mere mention of Ferdinand Frog. And while they were busy tittering, Mrs. Woodchuck's son Billy helped himself to a piece of carrot from Aunt Polly's store of roots and herbs.

"I must have a look at the Muley Cow this very morning," Aunt Polly told her caller. "Won't you come with me?"

Mrs. Woodchuck said that nothing would please her more. So she ordered Billy to scamper home.

"You'll have to wait till I put on my best poke," Aunt Polly said. "If the Muley Cow has a new one I don't want to call on her in my second best."

So Mrs. Woodchuck waited. And at last they set off together to find the Muley

Cow. They hadn't gone far before old Mr. Crow flapped down on a hummock near them.

"If you're looking for the Muley Cow," he squawked, "you'll find her down near the lane. And she's wearing her new poke, too."

They thanked him. And as soon as they had passed on Mrs. Woodchuck remarked what a busybody he was.

"Always poking his bill into other people's affairs!" Aunt Polly sniffed.

Still, his advice saved them a good many steps. For they found the Muley Cow just where Mr. Crow had said they would.

But she wasn't wearing a poke bonnet at all. They noticed that as soon as they caught sight of her.

"Perhaps it has fallen off her head and she doesn't know it," Aunt Polly suggested.

"I'll ask her," said Mrs. Woodchuck. And she hurried up to the Muley Cow.

"Where's your poke?" she cried. "You haven't lost it—have you?" As she spoke she noticed a peculiar something about the Muley Cow's neck. It was a sort of huge wooden collar, with a long stake that stuck out in front of her.

The Muley Cow acted very grumpy.

"Don't be impertinent!" she snapped.

"Excuse us, please!" Aunt Polly Woodchuck said to the Muley Cow. "We heard you were wearing a poke; and we wanted to see it. You know, I always wear a poke in summer. In fact, I put on my best one before leaving home."

The Muley Cow stared at her in a puzzled fashion. And at last the truth dawned upon her.

"You've made a mistake," she said. "You've misunderstood. It's not a poke

bonnet that I have. It's a *poke*—this thing around my neck."

Well, Aunt Polly and Mrs. Woodchuck didn't know what to say. And they felt so uncomfortable that they turned away and started off.

"Wait a moment!" the Muley Cow called to them. "How did you hear about this poke?"

"Old Mr. Crow told me," Mrs. Woodchuck replied.

"I thought so," said the Muley Cow. "And I'd like to have a talk with him."

XI

THE UNRULY MULEY

AFTER leaving the Muley Cow, who was wearing her new poke down by the lane, Aunt Polly Woodchuck and Billy Woodchuck's mother met old Mr. Crow again.

"Did you see her?" he asked them hoarsely.

"Yes!" they answered.

Mr. Crow gave them a sly leer. "What do you think of it?" he inquired.

They said that the poke was the strangest collar they had ever set eyes on.

"Ha! ha!" the old black rascal laughed. "I see that you don't know what it's for. . . . It's to keep the Muley Cow from

jumping the fence into the back pasture. Farmer Green put it around her neck this morning."

"Did you ever?" said Billy Woodchuck's mother.

"Well, I never!" said Aunt Polly.

"We expected to see a poke bonnet," they both told Mr. Crow.

That made him laugh again hoarsely.

"She wants to see you. The Muley Cow wants to talk with you," Aunt Polly Woodchuck informed him.

"Is she feeling pleasant?" he asked.

"No, I shouldn't say she was," Aunt Polly replied.

"Then I'll fly over and call on her a little later," he decided. "But first I must finish my breakfast." Thereupon he rose into the air and sailed away toward the cornfield, leaving two very puzzled Woodchuck ladies behind him.

If there was anything that Mr. Crow enjoyed more than another, it was teasing some person that was angry. So he kept his word. As soon as he had finished his breakfast he came back to the pasture and sought out the Muley Cow.

"Good morning!" he said very politely.

"Ah, ha!" she cried. "You've been gossiping about me. You've been telling everybody about this poke."

"It's most becoming," Mr. Crow said with a grin. "I supposed you'd like to have the neighbors know you were wearing something new."

"Well, I don't!" she retorted. "It's bad enough to have a poke put on my neck, at my age, without having the news spread all through Pleasant Valley."

"You can thank yourself for the fix you're in," Mr. Crow told her bluntly.

"At your age you should have known better than to jump fences."

"How would you like it if you had to stay in this pasture day after day?" the Muley Cow asked him.

Mr. Crow hemmed and hawed.

"How would you like it if you couldn't go into the cornfield?" she went on.

Mr. Crow choked slightly but made no reply.

"How would you like it if I went up and down Pleasant Valley telling everybody that you were a—"

But Mr. Crow didn't care to hear any more. He knew that the Muley Cow was going to say something about his stealing corn.

"It's getting late," he interrupted, though the sun hadn't been up an hour. "I must be poking along." And then he flapped himself away."

That was just like Mr. Crow. Whenever he found himself getting the worst of an argument he wouldn't talk any longer.

"*Poking* along, indeed!" the Muley Cow snorted as she watched him sailing toward the woods. "He can't fool me. He said that just to be disagreeable. He was poking fun at me!"

XII

THE COWBIRDS

SOME of the Muley Cow's friends were very sorry for her, when Farmer Green put the poke around her neck to keep her from jumping the pasture fence. It was a heavy, clumsy thing to carry about all day. Sometimes, if she was not careful, the Muley Cow knocked her knees against it.

Of course, there were others in the herd, like the little red cow and the big white one, that made disagreeable remarks. When they said unkind things to her the Muley Cow pretended that the poke didn't trouble her.

"Don't you know," she said to them one day, "that it's an honor to wear a poke? It shows that I'm the most valuable animal in the herd. Farmer Green doesn't intend to lose me, if he can help it."

"Nonsense!" the little red cow cried. "Farmer Green makes you wear the poke because he doesn't want you to teach the young cattle bad habits. If he hadn't stopped you from jumping you'd soon have had all the youngsters at it."

It was now the Muley Cow's turn to cry, "Nonsense!" But somehow she couldn't quite say the word. She had a queer, guilty feeling. And she walked away looking quite glum. She didn't want to talk with anybody.

After her there followed a small flock of cowbirds.

"We aren't intruding, I hope," one plump cowbird remarked with a smirk as

he settled himself near the Muley Cow's forelegs, when she stopped to graze.

"You can always count on us as being good friends of yours," a dull gray dame told the Muley Cow.

"When you're feeling sad you can depend on us to cheer you up," a glossy, greenish black gentleman chimed in with a chuckle.

The Muley Cow couldn't help thinking how pleasant it was to be among such kind companions.

"If you'll take care not to step on us we'll catch these flies that are biting you," another offered.

"Thank you!" said the Muley Cow. "You're very good to do that for an old lady like me."

The cowbirds all laughed harshly at that. Though the Muley Cow didn't see any joke, she smiled in spite of herself.

At least, the cowbirds had said nothing about her poke. And that was certainly worth a smile.

In the past the Muley Cow had known plenty of cowbirds. But she had paid little heed to them, unless it was to tell them to fly away, for they were always hovering around a body's feet.

It wasn't long before the flock had caught every one of the flies that had been following the Muley Cow. And when the last one had been gobbled up—after a slight dispute as to who should have it—the cowbirds left the Muley Cow abruptly. And they seemed to have lost all their politeness before they went.

“They're shy—that's all,” the Muley Cow thought. “They hurried away before I could thank them.”

XIII

TRUTH WILL OUT

LATER in the day the Muley Cow had a chat with a song sparrow—a musical person who had a nest cunningly hidden in the center of a bush near the pasture fence.

“What a pleasant family those cow-birds are!” the Muley Cow happened to remark. “They’re so kind!”

The song sparrow gave her a queer look.

“Kind!” he echoed.

The Muley Cow saw at once that he did not agree with her.

“Yes!” she insisted. “They were very nice to me this morning. They caught all the flies that were bothering me.”

The song sparrow gave a slight sniff. "They were only having their breakfast. You may be sure that they didn't catch the flies to oblige you."

"I wish," said the Muley Cow, "you wouldn't speak rudely of my friends, because they are very pleasant."

"Why, they're outcasts!" the song sparrow cried. "No decent bird will have anything to do with them. They lay their eggs in our nests and we have to bring up their lubberly children for them. If I were you I'd drive them away next time and let the flies bite. What's your tail for, anyhow, except to switch the flies off?"

"Really, I don't know," said the Muley Cow.

She felt somewhat foolish.

And soon afterward the song sparrow told his wife that there was always some-

thing to learn, no matter if one were as old as the Muley Cow.

The Muley Cow couldn't quite believe what Mr. Song Sparrow had told her about the cowbirds. But if it was true, she didn't want anything more to do with them. And if it wasn't true, she intended to be specially agreeable to them.

In order to find out what was what, the Muley Cow made up her mind to ask the cowbirds a question the very next time she met them.

It wasn't long before they gathered around her again.

"We've come to rid you of flies once more," they announced as they began to jostle one another while they snapped at the insects hovering about the Muley Cow. And one fat cowbird remarked with a smirk that it was too bad they hadn't brought the children along to help.

The others grinned; for the cowbird youngsters were all being cared for by other birds who had big enough families of their own without looking after outsiders. But they didn't know that the Muley Cow had heard any stories about that.

"Do bring your children along with you the next time you come to the pasture," the Muley Cow urged them. "I'm very fond of little ones."

The cowbirds tittered. They seemed to think there was a great joke somewhere.

"Our children are too small to leave home just yet," the fat person told the Muley Cow.

"The smaller they are the more I like them," the Muley Cow declared. "Won't you show me where your nests are? I'd love to see the little darlings cuddled in their beds."

The cowbirds stopped catching flies and

looked uneasily at one another. The fat one, however, was somewhat bolder than the rest. He fluttered up and alighted right on the back of the Muley Cow.

“We don’t take anybody to see our children until they leave the nests,” he told the Muley Cow.

She knew, then, that the song sparrow had told her the truth.

“And I don’t let cowbirds sit on my back—not after they’re grown up!” she snapped. As she spoke, the Muley Cow fetched the pert gentleman a smart smack with her tail.

The blow caught him unawares and knocked him squawking upon the ground. At once his companions began to scold the Muley Cow. And so did he—as soon as he got his breath back. “You’re a rough old thing!” he squalled.

“You’re rascals—all of you!” cried the

Muley Cow. "You can't fool me any longer. I know all about you. I wonder who named you *cowbirds*, for it's a deadly insult to me and all my family."

XIV

THE MUSKRATS' WARNING

IF it hadn't been for Johnnie Green there's no knowing how long the Muley Cow would have had to wear the wooden poke about her neck. Somehow Johnnie Green guessed that she didn't like it. So he teased his father to take the poke off her. And at last Farmer Green consented.

"We'll try her without it," he said. "We'll see how she behaves. We'll see if she has learned a lesson."

It was like a holiday for the Muley Cow when she went into the pasture without the heavy poke. For all her advanced

age, she kicked up her heels and galloped clumsily over the hummocky hillside, quite like a frisky calf.

For just a moment or two she was tempted to jump the fence, she felt so gay. But luckily she remembered, before it was too late, that if she left the pasture she would probably have to wear the poke all the rest of that summer. And she decided it was worth her while to behave herself.

So she stopped running—for that was just a temptation to jump; and she began to pull at choice clumps of clover with her long tongue. Then, feeling thirsty, she went to the brook, where it flowed into the mill pond, to get a drink.

She splashed down into the water, not caring at all because she wet her feet. In fact, she liked the feeling of the cool water. She had stuck her nose into the

brook and had drunk several great swallows when a squeaky sort of voice cried, "Stop that!"

The Muley Cow lifted her head and stared all around, while drops of water trickled off her muzzle and fell back into the stream.

At first she couldn't see anybody. And then the voice called again, "Stop that! You'll drain our pond dry if you drink so much of our water."

Then the Muley Cow saw who was speaking. It was Paddy Muskrat. With his wife he had crept out on some stones a little way off. And there they stood, chattering and waving their paws at the Muley Cow.

"Go away!" Mrs. Muskrat shrieked. "We don't want you here."

Just then the Muley Cow noticed a big frog who sat on the bank of the brook and

grinned at her. "What would you do if you were I?" she asked him.

Ferdinand Frog (for it was he) said nothing for a few seconds, but wrinkled his low brow; for he was thinking deeply.

"I believe I'd carry a parasol if I were you," he said at last. "It's a hot day and I believe you'd enjoy the shade."

The Muley Cow was puzzled. She couldn't see that Mr. Frog's answer had anything to do with the case. But Paddy Muskrat exclaimed at once that Mr. Frog had hit on the very thing.

"Go get your parasol at once!" Paddy cried. "You're liable to have a sun-stroke."

"But I haven't a parasol," she objected.

"Then borrow one from Farmer Green's wife," said Mrs. Paddy. "To be sure, I don't believe in borrowing—as a

rule. But it's different when somebody's in danger of a sunstroke."

Now, the Muley Cow began to feel very queer. She had never had a sunstroke; she had never even heard of one. But they sounded quite dreadful. So she climbed quickly up the bank and went and lay down in the shade of a great oak.

That was the best she could do. She knew that Farmer Green's wife would never lend her a parasol.

Anyhow, the Muskrat family was satisfied. They felt that they were no longer in danger of having their pond drained dry.

XV

CARRYING A MESSAGE

AFTER Paddy Muskrat and his wife talked to her about sunstrokes, the Muley Cow tried to keep in the shade during the rest of the day.

Toward evening, who should come trotting out of the woods but Tommy Fox. When he noticed the Muley Cow (as he soon did, for the wind told him where she was) he turned aside to speak to her. He inquired carefully about her health, said that he hoped she was enjoying the fine weather, and remarked finally that he was glad he met her because it would save him a trip to the farmyard. "That is,"

Tommy added, "if you don't mind carrying a message for me."

The Muley Cow had always heard that the Fox family was terribly sly and tricky. Still, Tommy was most polite. Really, she didn't like to say no.

He saw that she couldn't quite say yes. "It doesn't matter," he told her carelessly. "There's the little red cow over there. I know she'll be glad to oblige me."

That was just the thing to make the Muley Cow want to do his errand.

"I'm sure I should be delighted to accommodate you," she told Tommy Fox. "Give me your message. And when I go home this evening I'll deliver it."

"It's for the young gobbler, Turkey Proudfoot," Tommy Fox explained. "Please tell him that a gentleman wishes to meet him by the stone wall to-night, as soon as it grows dark."

“Very well!” said the Muley Cow. “I’ll tell Turkey Proudfoot that I saw you and I’ll give him your message.”

“Oh! Please don’t mention my name!” Tommy Fox begged her. “Just say, ‘a gentleman.’ You see, it’s to be a surprise. . . . You know everybody likes surprises,” he added, as he grinned at the Muley Cow in the most innocent way.

She remembered that she had liked surprises herself when she was younger. So she agreed to give Turkey Proudfoot the message exactly as Tommy Fox had told it to her.

And she did. When milking time came, and Johnnie Green and old dog Spot drove the cows home, down the long lane that led to the barn, and the Muley Cow saw Turkey Proudfoot strutting about the farmyard, she told him something. She told him that a slim, red gentleman with a

bushy tail and a sharp nose wanted to see him near the stone wall at nightfall. "He has a surprise for you," she added.

The moment he heard the message Turkey Proudfoot's tail drooped and he forgot to strut. He even shook slightly, as if something had frightened him. And then, to the Muley Cow's astonishment, he began to gobble at her.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself—trying to get me into trouble with Tommy Fox!" he scolded.

The Muley Cow was still more amazed. She hadn't mentioned Tommy Fox's name; and she couldn't understand how Turkey Proudfoot had guessed who the gentleman was. Besides, she wondered why Turkey Proudfoot was angry. Tommy Fox was such an agreeable person that she felt sure he must have planned a very pleasant surprise.

It appeared that Turkey Proudfoot had quite a different notion. It was so different that he didn't even dare to roost in the tree in front of the barn that night, but crowded right into the henhouse. The hens made a great fuss and ordered him out. But he simply wouldn't take the hint.

XVI

CLOVER TOPS

THE Muley Cow noticed that Billy Woodchuck was making many trips back and forth across the pasture. Watching him carefully, she saw that he always crept under the fence and stole into the field where the clover grew. And every time he came back again he looked plumper than before.

“That clover’s not intended for you,” the Muley Cow told him at last. She thought that ought to be enough to stop him. But it made not the slightest difference. Billy Woodchuck continued to visit the clover-patch just as often as ever.

And it seemed to the Muley Cow that he stayed longer each time he went there.

“Something will have to be done to keep that Woodchuck boy out of our clover,” she announced to the rest of the herd. “If we don’t stop him there’ll be no nice clover hay for us next winter.”

“Somebody ought to put a poke on him,” said the little red cow. And everybody laughed—everybody except the Muley Cow. She saw nothing funny in the suggestion. She thought it silly; and she said as much, too: “Who ever heard of a Woodchuck wearing a poke about his neck?”

“Have you told Billy Woodchuck to keep out of the clover?” one of the Muley Cow’s friends inquired.

“I’ve dropped a hint; but it seems he can’t take a hint,” the Muley Cow replied.

"Then some one will have to speak plainly to him," the friend said. And the whole herd told the Muley Cow that she was the one to do it, because she was the oldest cow on the farm.

So the next time that Billy Woodchuck hurried by on his way to the clover-patch, the Muley Cow stood right in his path and stopped him.

"Go back!" she said severely. "You mustn't eat any more clover. You've had too much of it already."

Billy Woodchuck sat up on his hind feet and stared very hard at the Muley Cow.

But he said never a word.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked him. "Can't you speak when you're spoken to? Have you nothing to say?"

It appeared that he had. "I was think-

ing," he stammered, "what a pity it is that you lost your horns."

The Muley Cow gave a sort of snort.

"Don't be a ninny!" she cried. "I never lost my horns. I never had any to lose. That's why they call me the Muley Cow."

Billy Woodchuck sat as still as a mouse and never took his eyes off her. It gave the Muley Cow a queer turn to be looked at so steadily. It made her fidget and squirm.

"Well! well!" she exclaimed. "How strangely you act! What's the trouble with you? Are you ill?"

"No!" said Billy Woodchuck. "I was only thinking what a long face you have."

"Nothing of the sort!" the Muley Cow spluttered. "It's my opinion that you can't see well. There must be something wrong with your eyes. And I haven't a

doubt that the trouble is just this: You've eaten too much clover."

XVII

NO HELP FROM SPOT

BILLY WOODCHUCK was a great deal wiser than the Muley Cow had ever suspected. She had thought she could frighten him. By telling him that he couldn't see well because he had eaten too much clover, she actually expected to keep him out of the clover-patch. So she had a great surprise when he said to her:

“You must be mistaken. I know there's nothing the matter with my eyes, because *I can see right through you!*”

The Muley Cow knew then that she had only been wasting words on Billy Woodchuck. She realized that she hadn't

frightened him in the least. And she felt sure that the moment her back was turned he would scurry into the clover-patch and nip off as many of the juicy red tops as he could hold.

So she turned away. And sure enough! The moment she moved aside, out of his path, Billy Woodchuck made a bee line for the fence. He was under it in a twinkling.

And the Muley Cow knew what was happening to the clover-tops.

“There’s only one thing to do,” she muttered to herself. “I’ll speak to old dog Spot about this Woodchuck youngster.”

So she did, that very evening. When Spot came to drive the cows home she told him that there was a young son of Mrs. Woodchuck who spent most of his time in the clover-patch. “I know you’ll be in-

terested to hear the news," she said.

Old Spot shook his head.

"It's no use," he growled. "I've known for weeks what was going on in that field of clover. It's full of Woodchucks. But I never can catch them. They always have a sentinel—a watcher—who whistles if I try to surprise them."

"But I don't want you to *catch* them," the Muley Cow explained. "I only want you to *scare* them. And most of all, I want you to frighten that young Billy Woodchuck. He's the greediest of the lot."

"I could chase them home a dozen times a day and they'd always come back again," said old Spot with a sigh.

The Muley Cow saw that she could expect little help from him. And it made her feel a bit peevish.

"We need a good, young dog on this

farm," she declared. "One that's not old and fat and lazy!"

Now, Spot knew better than to argue with the Muley Cow. But he couldn't help saying to her, "Let's see! You and I are just the same age, aren't we?"

And for once the Muley Cow wished she had horns to prick somebody with.

XVIII

ONE APPLE TOO MANY

It was a long time since the Muley Cow had jumped the pasture fence. By making her wear a poke for a while Farmer Green had taught her to behave herself. But there came a day, finally, when she made up her mind that just one more jump wouldn't do any great harm.

There had been a strong wind during the night, which had whipped a good many red apples off the trees. It was when the Muley Cow smelled them that she decided that she would jump the fence. She wanted to get into the orchard before anybody could pick up the apples and take

them to the cider mill. So over the fence went the Muley Cow.

She had a pleasant time eating apples—until something happened to put an end to her feast. Something kept the Muley Cow from swallowing another mouthful.

It was lucky that Johnnie Green felt hungry. He went to the orchard himself to fill his pockets with apples, when he saw the Muley Cow—his own Muley Cow—acting in the strangest manner. She was staggering about among the trees and making the queerest sounds.

Johnnie Green ran quickly to the barn and called to his father. “There’s something wrong with the Muley Cow!”

“Where is she?” his father asked him.

“In the orchard!” Johnnie said.

Farmer Green caught up a whip—a whip with a long lash and a limber stock.

With Johnnie following him he ran out of the barn, across the yard, and into the orchard. "Don't whip her for jumping the fence!" Johnnie pleaded.

His father never said a word.

"I wish I hadn't told him," Johnnie Green panted. He was doing his best to keep up with his father. He thought he would rather take a whipping himself than have the Muley Cow get one. But he didn't know how he could ever make his father feel the same way. He had noticed that his father reached for the whip as if he fully intended to use it.

When Farmer Green reached the Muley Cow he did a queer thing. At least it seemed queer to Johnnie. Instead of whipping the Muley Cow, his father ran the whip-stock down her throat!

"What's the matter?" Johnnie asked.
"Why do you do that?"

"She's choked over an apple," his father explained, "and I'm trying to shove it along."

Well, it wasn't a great while before the Muley Cow seemed to be quite herself again.

"Rough treatment!" Farmer Green remarked. "But it certainly fixed her."

"Why did she choke?" Johnnie wanted to know.

"She tried to swallow a whole apple," said his father. "Whenever you feed such things as apples or potatoes to a cow you must always chop them into pieces. . . . Now drive the old cow to the barn," he told Johnnie. "She'll have to wear a poke again."

When the Muley Cow heard that she wondered if she hadn't been very foolish.

XIX

A QUESTION OF LUCK

"How lucky some people are!" said old Mr. Crow. He was talking to the Muley Cow, in the pasture. And though she didn't specially care for his company, she was curious enough to ask him what he meant.

"I was just thinking," Mr. Crow explained, "I was just thinking what a hard life I lead, and how I have to hunt around to find whatever I can to eat. In winter it's usually poor pickings for me. But some people have their meals set right under their noses. They don't even need to stir."

"I suppose," the Muley Cow ventured, "you're thinking about us cows."

"I am," he admitted. "You have such an easy time that often I actually wish I had been born a cow myself."

The Muley Cow shook her head.

"That would have been impossible," she murmured.

Old Mr. Crow flared up at once.

"I'd like to know why!" he shrieked. He was always ill-mannered when he was angry.

The Muley Cow stared at him coolly. She was a calm person, generally.

"You would have had to be a calf, in the beginning," she explained.

"Of course! Of course!" Mr. Crow spluttered. "Of course I knew that. You needn't bother to tell me things that everybody knows."

"Being a cow is not all fun, I assure

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you," the Muley Cow continued. "The trouble is, you can't go and come as you please. You have to do about as you're told. And I'm sure you wouldn't like that, Mr. Crow."

"Perhaps not!" he admitted somewhat grudgingly. "But they're not always looking for you with a gun," he croaked. "And you always have plenty of company."

"Too much, sometimes," said the Muley Cow. "You can get off by yourself whenever you want to. But how's a cow to get away from the herd?"

"She can jump the fence," said old Mr. Crow with a wicked gleam in his eye.

"Yes! yes!" the Muley Cow agreed hastily. "But we won't discuss that. And remember—a cow couldn't go miles and miles around Blue Mountain in just a few minutes, as you can."

The old gentleman couldn't see that there was anything specially pleasant in making long flights. "When I travel, it's generally because I'm hungry," he said. "It's because I'd starve if I stood still. And in winter I have to step lively, I can tell you. Food's scarce then, for us crows. We have to snatch a morsel wherever we can find it, while you fat cows are having the best of things in a warm barn. . . . Yes!" he declared somewhat sourly. "You're enjoying the finest of food—out of season, too."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the Muley Cow.

"Corn!" Mr. Crow snapped. "Doesn't Farmer Green fill the silo with corn in the summer? And doesn't he feed it to you in the winter? Deny it if you can!"

XX

GOOD CORN WASTED

MR. CROW had been talking about the corn in the silo, which Farmer Green fed to the herd during the winter. And the Muley Cow could see that he was growing angrier every moment.

"Well! well!" she exclaimed. "You don't object—do you?—if Farmer Green feeds us corn that he raised himself."

"Certainly I do!" Mr. Crow fumed. "It's not fair. He doesn't store away any nice sweet corn in a silo for me."

"Ah! You wouldn't like it if he did," the Muley Cow told him.

"Why not?" Mr. Crow asked. "Why

shouldn't I enjoy nice sweet corn in the dead of winter?"

"Because—" said the Muley Cow—"because the corn from the silo isn't sweet. It's sour, Mr. Crow. And you wouldn't care for it at all."

The old gentleman looked surprised.

"How sour is it?" he inquired.

"I'd hate to say," the Muley Cow replied.

"I insist on your telling me," he croaked. "I insist; for I've a right to know."

"Well," said the Muley Cow, "the corn from the silo is not quite as sour as your temper, Mr. Crow. And that's all I can say."

That seemed to be enough for him. He asked no more questions, but flew off in a terrible rage. And he told all his friends that it was a shame, the way Farmer

Green ruined the corn by putting it in the silo. "It turns sour," he explained. "And Farmer Green has to feed it to the cows, because nobody else will eat it."

All the crows in Pleasant Valley agreed that it was a pity to spoil good corn like that. They even had a meeting—a crow caucus—in the pine woods, they were so upset.

"What can we do about it?" they asked one another.

Nobody could supply an answer.

"If we could eat all the corn before it's cut, we could save it—" old Mr. Crow began.

But the rest shouted him down. They knew *that* couldn't be done.

"There's your friend, the Muley Cow," said one of them to old Mr. Crow. "Why don't you tell her that Farmer Green's not treating the herd well? He gives

them spoiled corn. If they'd refuse to eat it, it would serve him right."

"A good idea!" said everybody else—except old Mr. Crow. As for him, he made a wry face.

"I don't enjoy talking with the Muley Cow," he objected. "Besides, a talk with her would be of no use. She's one of the most stupid people I ever saw."

After a good deal of teasing by his cronies Mr. Crow at last consented to speak to the Muley Cow once more. And flying to the pasture, he flapped down near her.

"If I had been born a calf—" Mr. Crow began. But he got no further than that before the Muley Cow broke in upon his words.

"If you hadn't been born a rascal everybody would have a better opinion of you," she told him.

He began squawking at her at the top of his lungs.

But the Muley Cow didn't care. She continued to twist her tongue around mouthfuls of grass quite as if Mr. Crow had never been born at all.

And that was the end of that.

XXI

A BRAVE DEED

NOBODY had ever supposed that the Muley Cow had much courage. In many ways she seemed quite timid. Perhaps if she had had horns she would have been different. Anyhow, whenever anything startled her the only thing she ever did was to run away, if she could. If old dog Spot barked at her heels the Muley Cow always hurried to get out of reach of his snapping jaws. If Farmer Green shouted at her she was more than likely to mind him. And usually she even did as Johnnie Green told her to do. In all her life she was never known to fight. Yet there

came a time when many of her friends claimed that she was very brave indeed.

On a crisp fall evening a terrible, grinning fellow known as Jack O'Lantern appeared about the farmhouse. Johnnie Green, at least, did not fear him, in spite of his flaming features. For Johnnie and Jack spent the whole evening together. Whenever the clatter of a wagon sounded from the road, the two rushed out to the gate, to be there when the wagon passed.

It was said that strangers seemed to be frightened. Anyhow, shouts were heard. Old dog Spot did a great deal of barking. And Miss Kitty Cat hid under the woodpile. Queer tales travelled like wildfire that night. All the after-dark prowlers knew about Jack O'Lantern. And some of them saw—and feared—him.

After Johnnie Green went to bed Jack sat a long time on a fence post and grinned

at the black night. And nobody—except Benjamin Bat—dared go near him.

After a while Jack O'Lantern vanished. His gleaming eyes no longer flashed, his horrid mouth no longer grinned. And nobody cared to go near the place where he had sat, to see what had become of him.

At dawn Miss Kitty Cat crawled out of the woodpile to do a little early hunting. And she claimed that at that hour Jack O'Lantern still sat on the fence post. She saw the back of his head—so she said. And that was enough for her. She did not look at him a second time. And yet—when broad daylight came Jack O'Lantern had vanished completely.

It was a great mystery. And when at last the Muley Cow spoke up and said that she had done for Jack O'Lantern, nobody could believe her.

When Miss Kitty Cat heard the news

she went at once to the pasture. And going straight to the Muley Cow she made bold to ask her a question: "Is it true that you made away with that dreadful Jack O'Lantern?"

"Yes!" the Muley Cow replied. "I was the first one out of the barn this morning. And I knocked Jack O'Lantern off the fence post."

"What happened then?" Miss Kitty Cat wanted to know, as she stared round-eyed at the Muley Cow.

"He broke into a dozen pieces."

Miss Kitty Cat was suspicious. "If that's so, where are the pieces?"

"I ate them," the Muley Cow explained.

And everybody said she was very, very brave. And everybody shuddered at the Muley Cow's next remark. "The pieces tasted very good," she said. "It was as fine pumpkin as I ever ate."

XXII

TRYING TO BE FIERCE

THE Muley Cow rather enjoyed the talk she caused because she had eaten Jack O'Lantern. And feeling that any one so brave ought not to appear too meek and mild, she sometimes tried to look as fierce as she could.

Somehow she could never manage a frown when old dog Spot was about. But if she came across Master Meadow Mouse all alone in the pasture she never failed to bellow at him and ask him in a gruff tone what he was doing there.

When she first spoke to him like that Master Meadow Mouse was startled.

"I'm only taking a stroll," he piped.

The Muley Cow glared at him for a few moments. She wanted to act ferocious; but unfortunately she could think of nothing more to say. And not wishing to seem at a loss for words, she began to cough.

Before she had stopped coughing Master Meadow Mouse ran away. And that was exactly what the Muley Cow had hoped he would do. It would have been very awkward for her if he had waited until she had stopped coughing. For try as she would, she could think of nothing ferocious to say.

The next time the Muley Cow met Master Meadow Mouse she bellowed at him again and stamped her feet at him, so that the ground trembled beneath him. He was too frightened to run. So he stood still and shivered. And that made the Muley Cow quite uncomfortable. Master

Meadow Mouse stared at her while he panted with fright. And again the Muley Cow could think of nothing but pleasant remarks to make.

So she began coughing once more. But to her great dismay Master Meadow Mouse didn't run away. And since she couldn't cough forever, but had to stop sometime, she paused to get her breath. And then she asked him a question.

"Can't you see I'm very fierce?" she inquired. "Why don't you run away?"

"I was waiting to see what happened," said Master Meadow Mouse pleasantly. "I thought maybe you'd choke."

Well, the Muley Cow was so surprised she didn't know what to say to that. And to hide her confusion she started coughing again.

Again she stopped, for of course she soon had to. Master Meadow Mouse had

waited hopefully, watching her closely to see if she were not going to choke that time; anyhow. And when she didn't he was quite disappointed.

"Try it again—will you?" he besought the Muley Cow.

"What!" she bawled. "Do you *want* me to choke?"

"Yes!" he told her. "I thought that if you did, Farmer Green would come and run a whip-stock down your throat. And that would be great fun to watch, you know."

The Muley Cow gasped. She saw that Master Meadow Mouse knew all about her choking over an apple, in the orchard. And that was something she never liked to talk about. To tell the truth, she was somewhat ashamed of the whole affair. "Go away!" she bade Master Meadow Mouse. "Go away! I don't want any-

thing to do with you.” But her voice wasn’t the least bit fierce. Nor was he the least bit frightened.

In the end it was the Muley Cow herself that ran off. And Master Meadow Mouse even followed her all the way to the bars.

The Muley Cow was so ashamed to have been chased by a Meadow Mouse (and a young one, at that!) that she scarcely dared look anybody in the face until milking-time.

XXIII

THE VOW OF A COW

ALL the cows in the barn were much upset. They had heard some news that didn't please them. Farmer Green was going to buy a milking machine!

"He'll never use it on me," the Muley Cow declared. "None of my family has ever been milked by a machine; and I don't intend to be the first."

Her companions all felt just as she did. If Farmer Green could have listened to their mutterings and rumblings and murmurings he might not have dared bring home any milking machine. But he never dreamed that the whole herd was *against*

one. As for his son Johnnie—and even the hired man—they had said all along that they thought a milking machine would be a fine thing to have.

The hired man had milked cows all his life—millions of them, so he said! And he told Johnnie that he no longer found any fun in turning out of a warm bed on a cold winter's morning long before daylight, to milk cows.

Now, Johnnie Green had only learned to milk during the summer before. But strange to say, he had already begun to feel somewhat as the hired man did. Milking was not half the sport that it was in the beginning.

The great day came at last when the milking machine arrived. There was an unusual bustle in the cow barn while it was being set up and tested. Since it was winter, the cows had little else to do but

watch what was going on—and grumble. They all felt just as they had when they first heard about the new machine—that is, all but the little red cow, who always stood next to the Muley Cow when they were in the barn.

To everybody's surprise the little red cow announced that she was glad the milking machine had come. "You're behind the times," she said to the Muley Cow. "You prefer to be milked by hand, the old-fashioned way. But I like new-fangled things. And folks say that milking machines are very stylish this winter."

For a few moments the Muley Cow gazed, open-mouthed, at the little red cow. "You don't mean to say," she gasped at last, as soon as she could speak, "you don't mean to say you're going to let them hitch that machine to you, do you?"

"Certainly I am!" cried the little red

cow. "If I want to be fashionable I'm sure it's nobody else's affair."

The Muley Cow turned to the big white cow, who stood listening eagerly to every word.

"We'd better ask Farmer Green to move us," the Muley Cow said to her. "This neighborhood is getting too fashionable for us."

"Not for me!" the big white cow replied. "I quite agree with the lady on the other side of you. And we really ought to speak to Farmer Green about changing our places—she and I. For it's not half stylish enough for us here."

When she saw how both the little red cow and the big white one felt about the milking machine, more than ever the Muley Cow vowed that she would never be milked by it. No, never!

XXIV

HUMBUGS

THE new milking machine was all ready to use.

"Which one are you going to try it on first?" the hired man asked Farmer Green.

"Let's hitch it to the little red cow," said Johnnie Green's father.

The little red cow gave the Muley Cow a sly nudge. "Did you hear that?" she asked. "Farmer Green knows who's fashionable. He chooses me to be first! And it's a great honor."

"Nonsense!" said the Muley Cow. "He picked you because you're the small-

est cow on the farm. He thinks you wouldn't dare object to the milking machine. . . . Just you wait till they try it on me! I'll kick! I'll bellow! I'll switch my tail at them!"

The little red cow made no reply. Already Farmer Green and the hired man had stepped up beside her. And they were just about to fasten the milking machine to her when the big white cow let out a frightened bawl.

"What's the matter?" the little red cow asked her.

"I was just thinking," she stammered, "what a terrible thing it would be if they couldn't stop the machine!"

That was an awful thought. Such an idea had never entered the red cow's head. And the moment she heard it she no longer wanted to be fashionable. She was so alarmed that she lashed out with both hind

feet in a most unladylike manner. And she plunged and roared and made such a fuss that Farmer Green and the hired man left her in disgust.

"She hasn't the brains of a hen," Farmer Green declared.

"Shall we try the big white cow?" the hired man asked him.

"No! She's a numskull too," said Farmer Green. He was feeling somewhat cross, for the little red cow had given him a smart kick. "Let's take the old Muley. She knows something, even if she is a jumper."

Well, what could the Muley Cow do? She had declared to all her friends that she would *not* be milked by any new-fangled milking machine. But when Farmer Green spoke so pleasantly about her she hadn't the heart to disappoint him. So she stood quite still for a few minutes.

And soon she had the honor of being the first cow in the herd to be milked the fashionable new way.

The little red cow was frightfully jealous of her. And she called the Muley Cow "an old humbug."

"You said you wouldn't let them do it," the little red cow spluttered. "And here you are, with the honor of being first!"

"And you—" the Muley Cow retorted—"you said you were glad the milking machine had come. But you certainly didn't act pleased when they offered to use it on you. . . . Speaking of humbugs, I should say you were one yourself."

For once the little red cow had nothing to say. The herd agreed that it was the *first* dispute in which she hadn't had the final word. And to their surprise, ever afterward the little red cow was meek and mild. She even let Farmer Green milk

her with the milking machine. And there was only one thing that ever vexed her. She never could bear to hear the word *humbug*.

THE END







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